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The Spirit of Cooperation: Volunteerism at Penn Vet

BY COREEN HAGGERTY

In addition to the many friends of Penn Vet who have supported the school financially over the years, countless others have shared their passion through volunteering. The full spectrum of the Penn Vet family—students, alumni, faculty, staff, friends—have helped move the profession of veterinary medicine forward through their contributions of time, knowledge and effort.

Benjamin Franklin once said, “People volunteering together in a spirit of cooperation could accomplish great things.” This spirit is evident in the efforts of the school’s students. Despite a rigorous curriculum, student volunteerism has been woven into the process of the school since its inception. In 1889, just two years after the first class began its education at the Penn Veterinary College, students organized the Veterinary Medical Society of the University of Pennsylvania, a precursor to the current Student Chapter of the American Medical Association (SCAVMA). Today, Penn Vet’s SCAVMA chapter and the student government support dozens of extracurricular clubs—from “Vet Students Care” Animal Rescue team that mobilizes students into disaster areas, to the Alpha Psi fraternity begun in 1908, to the Veterinary Business Management Association, which coordinates the Business



Ryan Nurse Tonya Foster with Cade, a cancer survivor who participates in Vet Pets. Photo by Debora Weber.



Dr. Bob Stewart, V'68, volunteers at the Penn Vet MASH tent on alumni day, 2008. Photo by Debora Weber.

Certificate Program, a business educational enhancement to the core curriculum.

In addition to membership in dozens of formalized clubs, Penn Vet students participate in externships, such as the Navajo Reservation Project, spaying and neutering homeless animals at the Philadelphia Animal Welfare Society, and the annual Run for Rabies.

This “spirit of cooperation” at Penn Vet does not end at graduation, as alumni continue to support their passion for their alma mater and consistently have served as pacesetters in professional and volunteer organizations. The Veterinary Medical Alumni Society (VMAS) was founded June 17, 1887, the day the first veterinary class graduated, and was the first organization of its kind in the United States. Today, VMAS membership includes more than 5,000 living Penn Vet graduates and advanced-

degree recipients (such as residents, interns, postdoctorates and fellows) and is led by almost 20 non-paid board members. Contributions by Penn Vet's alumni family range from serving on the Student Admissions Committee, providing feedback to the school on curriculum and serving as judges at student research events. Alumni serve as mentors to formal vet students and even "students-to-be" by helping children stitch injured stuffed animals at Penn Vet's well-known MASH Tent—a community effort supported by alumni, faculty, staff and students.

Alumni also serve as valuable mentors—through established channels like the Opportunity Scholarship Program, or simply by sharing the story of their life paths with students.

With the small- and large-animal hospitals together treating more than 50,000 cases annually, the volunteer programs that involve friends of the school are integral to care delivery. At the Matthew J. Ryan Veterinary Hospital, the volunteer program in the Emergency Service began in 1988. Since then, more than 500 people have participated. Volunteers come with diverse backgrounds—from accounting to graphic arts to the military—and provide necessary services such as restocking, patient restraint, stocking and cleaning. She serves as a member of the school's new financial planning advisory committee and had helped shape the school's short- and long-term strategies.

Defining the school's strategic direction and community outreach also has occurred through the dedication and global knowledge offered by volunteers. The school's Board of Overseers, formerly the Advisory Board, was developed in 1955. Today, more than 30 individuals in a broad range of disciplines—including education, business, government and agriculture—meet regularly with faculty, staff and students to address the school's most pressing issues. Current member **Eve Lloyd Thompson**, president of the Bernice Barbour Foundation, has been an overseer since 2002. She serves as a member of the school's new development advisory committee and has helped shape the school's capital campaign strategies.

Penn Vet faculty and staff also thrive on the opportunity to share their passion and talent with the larger community. Through Vet Pets, certified therapy pets of faculty, staff and students visit with families of seriously ill children at the Philadelphia Ronald McDonald House. Pets like Cade, a dog owned by **Bob Stewart, Jr., V'99**, and **Tonya Foster**, a nurse at the Rosenthal Imaging and Treatment Center, has been volunteering at the House for more than two years. A retired guide dog and cancer survivor who lost her left front leg to mast-cell cytoma, Cade

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selflessly shares the unspoken understanding of illness and recovery with her child friends and offers the “creature comfort of home” to these children and their families.

Non-human volunteers are not without other opportunities to give, and most contributions by animals for animals literally are life-saving. Through the Penn Animal Blood Bank and Bloodmobile, thousands of units of dog plasma are collected annually and processed into a variety of blood products, and 300 blood transfusions occur monthly through the “Pets Helping Pets Program” at the Ryan Veterinary Hospital. Donor cats in the Feline Renal Transplant Program actually provide a transplant kidney to an ailing pet of a client, and are subsequently rewarded with a new feline companion and a loving home. New Bolton Center animals also volunteer their services to patients. Through the large-animal blood-donor program, equine, bovine, caprine and ovine patients receive life-saving blood transfusions and plasma directly from NBC's teaching herds.

Ben Franklin would be proud that the spirit of volunteerism—of both humans and animals—has helped the School of Veterinary Medicine accomplish great things each and every day. 🐾